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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEAN](#) [BM](#) [VM](#)
SUBJECT: Vietnam Says it is Pressing Burma for ASSK's Release

CLASSIFIED BY: Harry Kamian, Acting DCM; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (SBU) Acting DCM and Poloff met with the MFA's Deputy DG for ASEAN Affairs, Vu Hung, December 2 to discuss EAP A/S Campbell and DAS Marciel's November 3-4 visit to Burma and to urge Vietnam to use its influence with Burma to press for genuine dialogue with Burma's democratic opposition and ethnic minority leaders in advance of the 2010 elections. Drawing on reftel guidance, A/DCM emphasized Aung San Suu Kyi's recent overtures to the military regime, stressing that it was important that she be permitted to meet with the NLD's entire Central Executive Committee.

¶2. (C) DDG Hung expressed appreciation for the readout of A/S Campbell's meetings in Burma and agreed it was important for the United States and Vietnam to exchange information. He acknowledged that Burma was a vexing issue, not just for Vietnam but for ASEAN as a whole. ASEAN's members were obliged to present a picture of uniformity to its dialogue partners, but behind the scenes member countries were striving to influence the Burmese regime's behavior. In its bilateral discussions with Burma, the GVN has pushed for ASSK's release, suggesting to the Burmese leadership that this would increase Burma's international standing while not jeopardizing the regime's hold on power. Senior General Tan Shwe recognized the utility of releasing ASSK but personally disliked ASSK, Hung said, adding that this animosity stood in the way. Hung added that he had heard talk that the regime might release ASSK immediately prior to the elections, a move he conceded would likely be dismissed as a propaganda stunt if the elections were not otherwise credible.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: This was the first time that a Vietnamese official explicitly told us the GVN had pressed Burma to release ASSK. DDG Hung offered the customary palaver about not giving offense to the Burmese authorities, arguing for example that Thailand's Chairman's statement had been too abrasive. He declined, however, to take refuge, as senior officials often do, in Vietnam's policy of non-interference. Vietnam's leaders may not give a hoot for democracy in Burma, but they dearly want their 2010 ASEAN chairmanship to go smoothly and recognize that Burma is a potential spoiler. Pragmatism, if not idealism, is prompting a tougher stance.
Michalak